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The Ransom Deal - A Conflict Of Policies

The Administration in Washington can hardly fail to harbor a nagging feeling of responsibility for the fate of those 1,113 Cuban freedom fighters who were imprisoned after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. The buildup for the invasion was sponsored and encouraged by the Eisenhower regime; but the final decision to go ahead was made by President Kennedy, and of course it was his Administration that held back from authorizing direct air support for the invaders and thus assured their defeat.

There are no grounds for impugning the good faith or intentions of any of those involved in this tragic mixup that has cost the United States so heavily in prestige. However, the fact remains that ever since then, the United States has labored under disadvantages in presenting to the world its case against Cuba. The important and encouraging feature of the developing situation just now is that our government is irrevocably dedicated to the search for a solution to the crisis in the Caribbean.

But meanwhile the fate of those prisoners cannot fail to be a matter of great interest to the Administration and to the American people. We (or our government) let these men down. Are we going to let them rot in Cuban prisons? That question is inescapable, but it does represent an overly simplified view of the problem.

Fidel Castro's frank blackmail tactics are repulsive and reprehensible. Whether the price for the invaders' freedom is tractors, money, or food and medicines, the fact remains that he seeks to trade in human lives. And no matter what kind of aid is given him in return for the prisoners' release (and some kind of deal seems definitely in the making), that help will nullify to an extent the effort to cut Cuba off from the world and strangle the Castro regime.

To say that James B. Donovan truly represents only the Cuban Families Committee for Liberation in his current negotiations with Fidel Castro would be to insult the intelligence of the American people. Such a statement might be literally correct, but he can hardly be going ahead in this fashion without the approval of the State Department and the White House. But at this point the extent of the government's role is cloudy to say the least.

The report that Central Intelligence Agency funds will go to Castro as part of the ransom for the prisoners has been countered with assertions that only food, medicines and medical supplies will change hands. The report is not yet made public; release of such information is re-

stricted by special legislative enactment. But obviously, if this deal is made, the facts must come out.

The question seems to be one of whether our regard for the fate of the freedom fighters—and our own responsibility for that fate—should be carried so far as to give Castro assistance he needs so desperately to keep the Cuban economy from collapsing. The U. S. policy is to cut him off from such help and we seek the aid of our allies in this effort.

The fact is that the 1,113 men involved in this pending deal constitute only a fraction of those Cubans being held in Castro's prisons because of their political beliefs and actions. Many of the latter were jailed in the roundup that immediately followed the abortive invasion. Are we going to accept responsibility for them too?

If this deal goes through, we'll presumably be told afterwards about its nature. That kind of ex post facto announcement will of course have considerable political repercussions but the American people will have no voice in the decision itself. This is not the way it should be in a free nation with a people's government.